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TAGS: SANR PREL ASEC JM

SUBJECT: JAMAICA: CRIME STATISTICS TRENDING IN THE WRONG
DIRECTION, BUT ONLY MINOR LINKS TO UPCOMING ELECTIONS

REF: KINGSTON 1237

Classified By: NAS Director A.Lewis for reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

¶11. (C) Summary: NAS Director and RSO met with Deputy Commissioner of Police Mark Shields on August 3 to discuss the current crime statistics and the Jamaica Constabulary Forces' preparations to prevent major politically motivated violence during the run up to the August 27 election. Shields agreed that the crime statistics year-to-date were trending in the wrong direction, e.g. murders are up by 6%, but remained firm in his belief that the "intelligence-driven hot spot" policing which he implemented last year with great success was holding the lid on what would otherwise have been an even bloodier toll. In Jamaica's current politically charged climate, the papers are labeling every incident as "politically motivated," however, Shields disagrees. In his view, only a fraction of the violent crimes, such as murder, have anything to do with politics. In Shields' opinion, despite a slow start, the Jamaica Constabulary Force (JCF) will be ready on election day, and he is pleased with the cooperation and collegial atmosphere between the JCF and the Jamaica Defense Force (JDF) that will also provide security on election day. End Summary

Preparations by the Security Forces to quell political violence

¶12. (C) Shields was clearly frustrated by the lack of preparation island-wide to counter politically motivated violence prior to the election and on polling day. Despite the fanfare around an earlier press conference by the Jamaica Constabulary Force (Ref A), it wasn't until the Commissioner called all the Area Commanders, Assistant and Deputy Commissioners of Police to an all-day marathon meeting on July 31 to review each area's tactical plans that Shields believed that any detailed planning occurred. He shared with us that in some cases, when it seemed that the Area Commanders (St. James Parish was one example) were not prepared, the Commissioner called the Senior Sergeant from the area on the phone to verify that he was aware of the plans as outlined by the Area Commander, in most cases the Sergeants were not. It is indicative of general failure of management at the JCF, that the Commissioner had to call everyone in, wasting an entire day of work time, to ensure that tactical planning was done for the election. In addition to the tactical plans developed for each Area Command, the JCF intends to man a command center, and its Special Branch has promised weekly threat assessments and a compilation of any crime deemed by the JCF to be "politically motivated." Shields stated that the threat assessments are being prepared but not circulated as widely as he would like; however, he has yet to see the tabulation of "political" crimes.

¶ 13. (C) On the "good news" front, Shields did say that the Jamaica Defense Force seems well prepared and that cooperation between the JCF and JDF is better than it has ever been. The JDF plans to reinforce the JCF and will assist in particular with security in 19 constituencies of special concern, such as the Mountain View constituencies of East St. Andrew and South East St. Andrew where political violence has occurred in the past. Shields told us that in these areas, it is his intention to force the JCF to target gang leaders and known gunman, something that is not currently being done. He wants the officers to conduct regular patrols, conduct street-side searches, and hopefully lock the individuals up prior to election day. It is his hope that with this very public show of force, the JCF will give members of the community confidence to turn-out on election day. He admitted that he needs to plan the operations very carefully to ensure as much as possible that they target Opposition and Government areas equally, even simultaneously if possible.

Links Between Crime and Politics

¶ 14. (C) During a discussion on the current crime statistics, Shields stated that the press was overstating the links between the upcoming election and crime. For example, since July 30, there have been five murders in Jamaica, but only one was politically motivated. However, in at least four of the cases, the press found some sort of political link. Shields acknowledged that prior to the election, criminals took the opportunity to settle grudges, believing that politics would be the default excuse. He is pushing for all allegations of political violence to be taken seriously, and he will continue to do all he can to increase the separate reporting of statistics on all crimes that contain reasonable links politics.

General Crime Statistics: the trend is in the wrong direction

¶ 15. (C) Shields admitted that Jamaica's year-to-date crime statistics show a disturbing trend in the wrong direction. Murders in particular are up nationwide from last year by 6%, with gang-related murders up by an alarming 40% vis-a-vis last year's statistics. When you look parish-by-parish, it is clear that Shields' "hot spot" police techniques are working in some areas; the murder rate in Eastern Kingston, for example, is down by 41% over last year's already reduced number. However, parts of the Kingston Corporate area such as Western Kingston (up 79%), St. Andrew Central (up 36%) and St. Andrew South (up 36%) show that the JCF still has a long way to go to quell violent crime. In the Kingston Corporate area's worst locations, listed above, Shields stated that it was a combination of inaction by police and gang wars which account for the marked increase in murder. The story is the same in the outlying parishes: where there is good local management, and committed officers, such as in Manchester and Westmoreland, murders are down; where you have poor and/or corrupt management, such as in Clarendon, St. Mary and St. Elizabeth, the murder rate is up. Shields stated that were it not for a few committed officers, the murder rate would be much worse, rather than a 6% overall increase vis-a-vis last year, we would see an increase in excess of 10%.

¶ 16. (C) Comment: Shields is one of five British police officers brought to Jamaica to promote institutional change from within the Jamaica Constabulary Force. His high-profile and multiple television appearances in March and April, after the death of Pakistan's cricket coach, won him no new friends in a force already resentful of his position as Deputy Commissioner of Police for Crime. In addition, the already frosty relationship Shields had with the current Commissioner of Police, Lucius Thomas, has almost descended into open dislike between the two, with Thomas visibly doing all he can to block and undermine Shields' efficacy. It is evident that Shields remains frustrated with the utter lack of strategic leadership within the JCF. In the year and a half that he has been in Jamaica, he has only been able to nibble at the

edges and make minor changes in an institution that is rife with problems, mismanagement and corruption. While Jamaica has thus far avoided a 1980's style meltdown into massive pre-election killing, the JCF's inability to plan and manage its limited resources effectively will remain a problem as long as there is not fundamental change within its leadership core. Squeaking by during this election season shouldn't be good enough. End Comment

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